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AUTHOR	Teodorescu, Daniel; Stoicescu, Cristian D.
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ABSTRACT

This paper compares the two educational sectors in Romania K-12 schools and higher education seeking to understand why reform in the K-12 educational system has failed while higher education reform has been more rapid and effective. The analysis uses concepts from U.S. organizational theory, such as school climate, school culture, and permanently failing organizations, to compare the healthiness of the two educational sectors. Several failures of K-12 school climate are identified, including: teacher disengagement, principals' low position in a bureaucratic hierarchy; deterioration in the social status of teaching; poverty; and a communist history of suspicion and terror. To counter these problems the authors call for reevaluation of the paradigms of educational administration, for a new school culture, for a rebuilding of the relationships between administrators and teachers, and for redefinition of the concept of performance in education. In contrast to the K-12 failures, the paper reviews some of the successes of the healthier higher education sector, where reformers have concentrated on changing administrative and managerial practices in colleges and universities, noting changes in admissions, curriculum and academic programs; in faculty hiring and evaluation and academic accreditation, in student services; and in funding mechanisms (Contains 6 references.) (CH)

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Organizational Culture, Organizational Climate and Permanently Failing Organizations: Useful Concepts for Describing the Roots of the Romanian Educational Crisis

By Daniel Teodorescu and Cristian D. Stoicescu

Paper presented at the 23rd Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held in Miami, Florida November 5-8, 1998

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Organizational Culture, Organizational Climate and Permanently Failing Organizations: Useful Concepts for Describing the Roots of the Romanian Educational Crisis

By Daniel Teodorescu and Cristian D. Stoicescu

INTRODUCTION

This is the paradox: after eight years of discussions and important efforts, the real process of educational reform at the K-12 level in Romania has not started yet. It is very difficult to identify --after a significant period of time--what has really changed in this Eastern European nation's K-12 educational system. Of course, there is a new legislation -- which is not yet fully implemented --and a plethora of new ideas dealing with the process of change in education. There are also a series of projects (such as those initiated by World Bank or the PHARE Fund) that attempt to improve the quality of education and to prepare the young generation for a democratic society. At the same time, there is an enormous disappointment among teachers, an obvious lack of interest for education among students and parents, and an important waste of human and financial resources within the educational system. In brief -- an important disengagement from educational actors.

On the other hand, considerable changes have taken place in the higher education sector, where reforms have been introduced much more rapidly and effectively. Managerial responsibilities have been redistributed among all components of the higher education system. The Ministry of Education has reduced significantly its power by transferring much of its responsibilities to universities and new academic buffer

organizations. Romania has successfully instituted one of the most complex higher educational systems in the Eastern European region: the buffer agencies have a wide array of responsibilities in areas such as evaluation and accreditation, funding of institutions, awarding of titles, diplomas and academic certificates, funding of scientific research, and implementation of reforms.

Why does this profound crisis in the Romanian K-12 educational system persist? Why higher education institutions have been more successful at adopting modern structures and management practices? Briefly, the answer proposed in this essay is that a profound mistake was made from the beginning of the reform efforts in the K-12 sector. Instead of dealing with "why" type of questions (qualitative approach), the persons responsible with the implementation of K-12 educational reforms chose to deal with "what" questions (quantitative approach). For this reason, we propose a qualitative approach to the process of change. This means that instead of attempting an endless enumeration of principles, objectives, methods or blocking factors-- which are useful but at the same time not helpful—this essay will rather focus on what has happened within our educational institutions in terms of climate, culture, and state of health.

Many recent ideas coming from researchers, teachers, students, or the civil society seem indeed capable to democratize the educational process, improve its quality, and increase the social role of education. But somewhere along the way something happens all the time and the net result of any change appears to be either null or directly opposite. The authors make accountable for this situation the fact that, comparing to the higher education sector, the educational administration in the K-12 sector, is in its infancy stage in Romania. Policy makers have not yet paid enough attention to this important

component of the educational system and, consequently, they are not familiar with modern practices and theories of educational administration. In contrast, the reforms in higher education have benefited for a more advanced expertise in educational administration. The reorganization of the whole system was based on models from developed countries. By adopting modern organizational structures, the decentralization of the relationships between state and universities and within universities has been achieved long before similar changes could be observed in K-12 schools. Finally, privatization and institutional diversification have been relatively more pronounced in the higher education sector than in K-12 schools.

To understand what has happened inside the Romanian educational institutions and compare the healthiness of the two educational sectors, in the first two sections we borrow from the American school of organizational theory concepts such as *school climate, school culture, and permanently failing organizations*. We attempt to use mainly as a key word "why" and not "what" and introduce new concepts for educational research in the field of change and reform in Romania such as school climate and school culture. In the context of educational change, we attempt to emphasize the important role of educational administration and show the importance of the paradigm that is used to ground this process.

In the last section we turn to the higher education sector to provide a synopsis of the most recent changes that swept Romanian universities in the areas of admissions policies, curriculum, faculty hiring, accreditation and evaluation and funding mechanisms. It is suggested that all these reforms, due to the heavy emphasis on borrowing practices of educational administration and structures that have proved

successful in other developed countries, have tended to create institutions that are relatively healthier than the K-12 schools.

Radiography and a merciless diagnostic: the Romanian K-12 schools are ill

Wayne K. Hoy, John C. Tarter and Robert B. Kottkamp (1991) define culture as shared assumptions and ideologies and climate as shared perceptions of behavior. To study climate is for them a way to determine effective strategies of change. Organizational culture can help decipher what set of organizational values are shared inside schools and in what ways these values infuse the actions of the organizational members. Because our goal is to understand change in schools as organizations, following Hoy and his colleagues' assumptions, we shall try to define the organizational climate in Romanian K-12 educational institutions but we want also to take in account the role of the school culture in the substantiation of the school climate. The authors quoted before define the school climate as a relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by the participants, affects their behaviors, and is based on their collective perception of behaviors in schools. It is influenced by formal and informal relationships, personalities of participants, and leadership in the organization.

A desirable school is a healthy one, and a healthy school has an open climate. An open climate is considered to be preoccupied with neither task achievement nor social needs, but both emerge freely as a result of the characteristics of their faculty behavior:

1. Low on disengagement,
2. Low on hindrance,
3. High on esprit (morale),

4. Low on aloofness,
5. Low on production emphasis,
6. High on trust,
7. High on consideration.

In the same book, a healthy organization is viewed as one that not only survives in its environment, but also continues to grow and prosper over the long term. It avoids persistent ineffectiveness. There are ten important properties that define a healthy organization:

1. Goal focus,
2. Communication adequacy,
3. Optimal power equalization
4. Resource utilization,
5. Cohesiveness,
6. Morale,
7. Innovativeness,
8. Autonomy,
9. Adaptation,
10. Problem solving adequacy.

The first three are task needs of a social system, the second three deal with the maintenance needs of its members or internal state of the organization, and the last four deal with growth and development.

What is the situation, from this perspective, within the Romanian K-12 schools? Discussing about school climate inside of Romanian schools we can identify the following specific features:

1. *Disengagement.* This is, first of all, a financial problem. Since in Romania teachers now have the lowest monthly income (about 70$) among professionals, in order to survive they either leave the school system or look for a second or third part time job. Consequently, teachers become more interested in their own financial situation and do not have enough time for their students.
2. *Hindrance.* Because inside of the educational system in Romania still exists a very strict hierarchy, teachers have too many committee requirements and for this reason their relationships with principals are affected by a lack of reliance from both sides. In our opinion, this situation is caused by the current system of election of the principal from within the teaching staff. Principals tend to be good teachers without a specific administrative training for their jobs. On the other hand, the principal is the lowest position in a very strict hierarchy inside a bureaucratic educational system. For this reason, the principal's position in the system is very vulnerable. Consequently, the teachers lose from their time to deal with the students' problems, time which is already affected by the urgency to secure additional income for their families.
3. *Esprit.* There is a visible deterioration of the social status of the teaching profession, which leads us to conclude that the morale of the Romanian teachers is not adequate. On the contrary, there are many signs that teachers

often look for financial advantages from their students. This image reflects the lack of confidence and interest from the students and their parents in the school system and the lack of commitment in the educational process from teachers.

4. *Intimacy*. In many Romanian large schools, especially in the urban area (where schools enroll about 2000 students and employ more than 100 teachers), it becomes very difficult for teachers to establish close relationships with their colleagues. Poverty is also a hindering condition; the history of a society built in the communist times on suspicion and terror is another one.
5. *Aloofness*. Generally, the principal's behavior is formal and impersonal. This situation is a result of a strict hierarchy and a lack of commitment and participation of the teachers in the decision making process.
6. *Production emphasis*. Romanian schools are characterized by close supervision and the principal tends to be highly directive and insensitive to faculty feedback.
7. *Trust*. Principals in the Romanian schools do not attempt "to move the organization", especially because they have few opportunities to manage it and because of a strict hierarchical system that only tries to survive and not renew itself.
8. *Consideration*. As a result of the aforementioned disengagement of teachers, hindrance, lack of esprit, aloofness, production emphasis and distrust, at it is very difficult to agree with the idea of consideration within Romanian schools.

One can, therefore diagnose the Romanian school climate in K-12 institutions as a closed climate that can be characterized as follows: (1) high on disengagement, (2) high on hindrance, (3) low on esprit, (4) high or average on antagonism and alienation, (5) high on aloofness, (6) high on production emphasis, (7) low in trust, and (8) low in consideration.

The emerging picture is one that defines Romanian schools as sick and incapable to grow and prosper over the long term or accomplish their task needs for the social system. These are also schools that do not seem capable to use properly their resources, schools that are not able to move to the new goals and objectives that are needed for the process of educational reform and have an effective contact with their environment.

This is the first answer to the question "Why is it still so difficult to change the undesirable situation that persisted for more than 50 years inside the Romanian schools?" The Romanian schools are ill and closed. As result of this conclusion, the authors identify a first direction for action: the necessity for educational administrators to build in schools and for them an open/healthy school climate. Consequently, instead of dealing with too general concepts such as democratization, decentralization or participation, the authors stress the need for educational administrators to define a process of change which starts with less ambitious but also more definable concepts. Such concepts include supportive relationships between teachers and school administrators, efficient communication between educational actors, teachers and principals' professionalism, shared decision making, school autonomy and community support and last, but not least, the financial situation of faculty. Notably, all these concepts have been taken in consideration by reformers of the higher education system.

In our effort to use the idea of school climate for a better diagnostic of the present situation of Romanian schools, we agree with Michael Fullan and Matthew Miles (1992) that educational reforms often fail because everyone involved in school reform has a personal map of the way change proceeds. For this reason, it is important to emphasize the importance of the school culture for the success of any educational reform. Only when educational actors share the same basic assumptions, values, and norms schools as organizations can define themselves, and consequently define their goals and the strategies needed to achieve these goals

Romanian K-12 schools: a long tradition and another impediment for change

Educational actors in Romania are hardly unaware of the deterioration of the school climate inside their schools. On the contrary, there are many signs that attest to the opposite situation. Romanian scholars often make responsible for this situation the state of anomie which defines the process of transition from communism to democracy (Birzea, 1994) or discuss with a sense of fatality about the attitude of accommodation with the deficiencies for educational actors. The concept of anomie --which was conceptualized by Emile Durkheim and developed by American sociologists such as Ralph Merton or Talcott Parsons -- can offer a suggestive image about our society in transition to democracy. This society is indeed characterized by a moral disintegration and discouragement, indeterminable goals and institutional disorganization. But again, questions arise as a logical result. Why is there this situation in our country? What has happened behind all these visible social facts?

We consider helpful for our attempt to understand the reasons of this undesirable situation the concept of *permanently failing organizations* developed by Meyer and Zucker (1989). Such organizations fail to achieve their proclaimed goals and this failure is neither temporary nor aberrant, but chronic and structurally determined. In brief, these organizations do not seek to improve their performances and try only to survive in an environment that they feel is hostile. Asking themselves about the reasons for this situation, Meyer and Zucker consider that organizations attract multiple operative goals that diverge from their official mission and are pursued by groups who wish to use organizations to further their own agenda. When such groups are in position both to block reorganizations and to discourage owners, sponsors or policy makers, permanent failure results.

According to this theory, can one infer that K-12 schools in Romania are permanently failing organizations? In our opinion the answer is positive and this is an outcome of more than 50 years of communism, time in which schools were only an instrument for communist propaganda and did not seek performance. We are aware of the argument that a discussion about the mission of educational institutions is more complicated and the concept of performance by itself can direct the discussion to other assumptions that define communist education such as manpower or production emphasis. But for the purpose of this paper, and according with Meyer and Zucker, we define performance for the educational system as the attainment of the program goals.

What happens when educational institutions do not attain their program goals? For the moment, nothing. This is because education is not an unoccupied building which can be demolished, re-built or rearranged as one could choose; it is in fact a popular

building inhabited by students who cannot be sacrificed whatever the called upon goals will be (Birzea et al., 1993). In the long run, however, the implications of such a situation are dramatic or simply tragic.

The concept of permanently failing organizations could explain the often-invoked passivity of teachers and dependence on their organizations. There is no place to go for teachers and for this reason they have a great motivation to maintain the organization, sometimes despite its bad performance. And this happens especially when the new objectives for change are too ambiguous or ill conceived. For these reasons, it is difficult to accept changes in educational systems and it is even more difficult to implement such changes.

What are the organizational responses to permanent failure mainly caused by the exercise of power on the part of dependent actors? How is it possible to restore high performance? Meyer and Zucker propose growth, innovation in the organizational structure, privatization and shifting employment relationships (in Hoy and his colleagues' words: the school climate), all of them pursued in order to limit the power of dependent actors. It is too a long discussion for this paper to deal with the implications of all these proposals for the Romanian educational system. However, we want to emphasize the necessity to build new relationships between members inside the Romanian K-12 educational institutions, in accordance with the values of a democratic society.

Finally in this section, we come back to the concept of school culture considered within the larger context of the social culture. According with Ivan (1997), covering the distance between the rhetoric about the necessity of participation and the cultural assumptions that establish a centralist-bureaucratic culture is the main difficulty that

educational reforms in Romania have to deal with. Such difficulty means that we have to understand that Romanian schools do not exist only to satisfy the requirements of the State, but also to satisfy the needs of students, parents, and local communities. In order to remain mobile and adaptable in a new social context, Romanian schools have to abandon the bureaucratic perspective in which the schooling system thinks only of what is necessary to do in order to survive and to perpetuate itself. The disengagement between teachers, students and parents in Romania shows the bankruptcy of a cultural pattern that rejects for educational actors the right to have their own educational choices.

In what ways is it possible for the Romanian educational system to cover this distance between what Argyris named theory set forth and theory in use? We consider this might be possible with the help of educational administration. Only by rethinking the role of this critical aspect of the process of educational reform can we really hope to implement it. This requires an additional effort to reevaluate the concept of paradigm in the educational administration. This is the way to establish clearly the new mission of the school in a new cultural context, to rebuild the relationships between groups in schools as organizations and to redefine the concept of performance in education.

Higher Education: A healthier sector

In this last section we argue that, unlike K-12 institutions, the higher education institutions, generally, are thriving, healthier organizations. Recent changes have shaped an academic system totally different from the one that had existed eight year ago. The reforms represent a success story, partly because, unlike K-12 reformers, the higher education reformers have concentrated first on changing the administrative and

managerial practices in colleges and universities. While we do not go again through the list of the characteristics of a healthy school climate, the positive changes described below are assumed to improve the healthiness of Romanian higher education.

Admissions, curriculum and academic programs

In Romania, the recent institutional autonomy in the areas of admissions, curriculum and academic programs essentially is the result of actions on the part of institutions. Governmental decisions and more recently, the new law of education have sanctioned many of these institutionally driven changes.

The Ministry of Education sets the general principles governing admissions and national minimum requirements. Each institution establishes its own admission policy conforming to the general principles. Admissions tests are organized for each field of study and transfers among different majors have become possible. Admissions policies are made public and are intensely disseminated through media. Admissions tests are established at the faculty and department levels. The university only verifies the correctness of admission decisions. The rector makes the final admission decision for new students.

New academic programs are established at the institutional level and harmonized at the national level by negotiating with other institutions that offer similar programs. The new law of education allows universities to establish programs independently. The quality control of academic programs is achieved through the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation.

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We've witnessed a tremendous diversification of the academic offerings (to the point that the Ministry of Education now insists that a minimum of 60 percent of programs offered in the same field have a common core.) Program flexibility has increased by increasing the proportion of elective courses. This increased flexibility has been accompanied by an increase in the per student educational expenditures.

Educational routes have become more flexible as well; students can transfer among institutions and among academic programs. However, the transfer from one academic program to another is not yet accompanied by the transfer of credits. New reforms will institute a new system of transferable credits and will generalize the modularization of study programs (which is already in place at large universities). The University of Bucharest has already introduced the new system of transferable credits.

Faculty Hiring and Evaluation

Each institution now can establish procedures and criteria of selection for its faculty. These criteria cannot be lower than the minimum national standards. This recently gained institutional freedom has lead to a substantial stratification within the academic system. The large public universities, very attractive to many candidates, have more selective hiring standards particularly for the higher ranks (full professor and associate professor).

Current reforms have shaped two academic routes within the Romanian academia: exclusively teaching routes (taken by those teaching in two year colleges where research performance is not important to the institutional mission), and teaching and research

routes at institutions with post-graduate programs, where research performance is an essential evaluation criterion.

The new law of education also introduces mechanisms of periodical academic evaluation of the faculty. Every five years, the faculty council and the university senate review the teaching and research performance for each faculty member. This mechanism represents a novelty in the Eastern European region and also in much of the developed countries.

The number of faculty is established by the faculty council, approved by the university senate and the Ministry of Education. Since budgetary allocations are partly based of the total number of faculty, each university exerts pressures for an increased number of positions. This often leads to overstaffed institutions.

Academic Evaluation and Accreditation

Romania was among the first countries in the region to create an accreditation body totally separated from the Ministry of Education. The state has transferred to the academic community most of the rights and responsibilities in the area of quality control of higher education.

The main responsibilities for academic evaluation and accreditation are with the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation, an independent organism, named by the Parliament. This organism is responsible to the Parliament only in the area of respecting legality; no state agency can interfere with its activities. The Council has relatively huge powers when compared to similar organisms in other countries. The council members are named for a four-year term from a pool of candidates proposed by

accredited higher education institutions. These candidacies are made public and can be contested. The council is made up of various specialty committees for all academic fields. The committees are autonomous in the issues that form the object of their specialty. The evaluation is performed in five areas: educational content (study programs); qualifications and competence of faculty; research performance; material resources, and financial resources. Minimum standards exist for each of these criteria.

Mechanisms of periodical evaluation have also been initiated: at least once every five years, the evaluation of institutions, faculties, and academic specialties is mandatory. In the event that an institution does no longer meet the standards upon which it was accredited, it will not be allowed to operate. What is also unique in the region is that the higher education reform program in Romania specifies the use of the evaluation results as a basis funding decisions.

Student Services

Another area in which Romanian universities have substantially improved administratively is the area of student services. The attempts from 1992-1993 to organize outsource the administration of food services and residence halls did not meet enough approval to be implemented. The administrative council for student services, equally represented by students and university administrators, manages student cafeterias and residence halls.

The state financial aid packages offered to Romanian students are considered to be among the most generous in the region (30-40 percent of the budget is for grants and subsidies for student services). One the one hand, such system facilitates the access and

increases the retention of students from low-income families; on the other hand, it places a serious burden on the budgets of higher education institutions. Beginning with 1994-95 fellowships for master level programs have been introduced; in 1996-1997, fellowships for Ph.D. students were also initiated.

The reform program for higher education stipulates the introduction of new financial aid options: student loans offered by banks; grants offered by foundations or corporations; contracts among universities and businesses; sponsorships, and funds from the local communities. Another reform priority is raising the selectivity and competitiveness of current merit grants.

Funding Mechanisms

In Romania, the legislative changes in the area of higher education funding have resulted in an increasingly higher financial autonomy on the part of institutions. The use of budgetary allocations has become more flexible. The allocation is made for only four categories of expenditures; personnel, financial aid, maintenance, and capital expenditures. Justified transfers among the first three categories are legally permitted. The use of funds raised by institutions is controlled by institutions themselves. At universities, and particularly at large public universities, the administrative councils decide on the use of approximately 20 percent of the total income (80 percent represent mandatory expenditures: salaries, financial aid, maintenance, and capital construction). One can expect that, as the total income grows, the proportion of funds whose use is decided by institutions will grow as well.

The university charts also stipulate a decentralization of the use of funds within institutions: the allocation of funds to departments, faculties, research centers and the administration of these funds by councils of faculties and departments. The new education law specifies a minimum of 4 percent from the GNP to be allocated to state higher education institutions. The law also promotes the diversification of sources of income for higher education: allocations from the state budget, money raised by institutions, subsidies, donations and sponsorships. An element of innovation in this law is the fact that university funding will be based on performance.

Radical changes have also taken place in the mechanisms for research funding. Reformers have created a special research fund, earmarked from the national research budget, which is competitively allocated by National Council for University Scientific Research.

To bring fairness and transparency to the allocation of public funds, the new law of education institutes the National Council for Educational Funding. This council, functioning as a consultative body, has the following roles: makes recommendations to the Ministry of Education regarding the objectives of financial policy for public higher education; proposes mechanisms and criteria for the allocation of resources to institutions; supports and promotes the competitive funding of specific projects; establishes mechanisms for financial audit of institutions. The Council is made up of representatives from academia and businesses as well as experts in financing. With the same objective in mind --preserving fairness and transparency to the use of public funds – the ministry has to present to the Parliament and publish annual reports regarding the state of education in the nation, including the public accounts for higher education.

The law of sponsorship, voted by the Parliament in 1994, provides a legal framework for individuals and corporations to support financially or through in-kind aid both teaching and research activities in higher education institutions. Unlike other countries in the region, the sponsorship of higher education institutions in Romania is direct and not through centralized funds. The sponsors can decide freely which institution to help and under which conditions. Universities are free to use the money from sponsors as long as they respect the conditions enunciated by sponsors (these conditions cannot contradict the university's chart). The sponsors are offered in exchange tax reductions or preferential rates for educational services.

Conclusion

There is so much to learn from the successful reforms of the higher education system in Romania. Instead of dealing with too general concepts such as democratization, decentralization or participation, reformers of K-12 schools in Romania could define a process of change that starts with less ambitious but also more definable, concrete concepts. Such concepts, inspired by our analysis of school climate, include supportive relationships between teachers and school administrators, efficient communication between educational actors, teachers and principals' professionalism, shared decision making, school autonomy and community support and last, but not least, the financial situation of faculty. As we have seen in the previous sections, all these definable concepts have been taken seriously into consideration by reformers of the higher education system.

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